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'Human Domain' Enters Future Army War Plans

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Feb 20, 2013 | by Richard Sisk

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. -- The Army's core mission as the world's dominant land power must meld with the challenges posed by future conflicts that will increasingly be fought over "human terrain," senior Army officials said here Wednesday.

"The rising velocity of human interaction" through the Internet and social media "makes influencing human behavior the centerpiece of military strategy" by recognizing the physical, cognitive and social influences on a civilian population targeted by an insurgency, said Lt. Gen. Keith Walker, director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center.

Planning for success in the Army "involves the intersection of land power and the human domain," Walker said, but the human factor has been missing in the strategic mindset of the military's civilian and uniformed leadership.

Walker said the recent wargaming exercise, Unified Quest, concluded that "the human is absent in our current doctrine, period. We don't talk about it."

The conclusion of the senior leaders led Walker to pose the question at the Association of the U.S. Army's Winter Symposium: "Do we have a gap in our strategic thinking?" Walker and several other generals and military analysts pondered the question at a panel discussion on "Strategic Land Power."

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"I put this in the bin of what's really going on," said Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, head of the Army's Special Operations command.

Through nearly 12 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, "we've developed a whole suite of ad hoc capabilities" driven by "what the battlefield's telling us to do," Cleveland said.

The Army came up with "human terrain teams" including anthropologists and the concept of the Provisional Reconstruction Team" with a foreign service compliment aimed at "bringing the State Department into the fight," Cleveland said.

"Then we did the great COIN experiment," Cleveland said, referring to the counter-insurgency strategy promoted by retired Army Gen. David Petraeus that stressed the buildup of local forces and small unit presence in the community. The COIN experiment is now the subject of heated debate on the blogosphere, Cleveland said.

Cleveland steered clear of giving his own estimation on the value of COIN.

"It's telling in that we're going to have to do something different to create dominance in the land domain" in future conflicts, he said.

The panelists questioned whether the Army would have the capability of doing something different in this new era of fiscal austerity.

"Right now we're entering a period of pretty sparse checkbooks" as the military struggles with \$487 billion in cutbacks already underway and the possibility that another \$500 billion in cuts would be added under the legislative process known as "sequester" on March, Walker said. He quoted Winston Churchill as telling his senior military leaders: "Gentlemen, we are out of money. It's time to think."

In adapting to human terrain, the U.S. must weigh the prospect of lengthy involvement in future conflicts that will be necessary to ensure strategic success, said Nathan Freier, an analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He cited the examples of Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We accepted minimal acceptable outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan" by announcing withdrawal schedules before the insurgencies were defeated," Freier said. "If we're honest with ourselves, the U.S. has been leaving the conflict with the conflict somewhat unfinished."

Retired Gen. Gordon Sullivan, the former Army chief of Staff and president of AUSA, added a postscript to the panel discussion on the way the Army might handle future conflicts without lengthy occupations and political entanglements.

Sullivan cited the 1990s examples of Operation Just Cause in Panama, where U.S. forces quickly ousted dictator Manuel Noriega and then quickly departed. He then noted Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq, in which the U.S. military protected the Kurd population against the forces of Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

"We have some examples of what would pay off for us in the future," Sullivan said.

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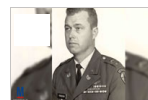
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